



HEALTH

U.S. Department of Education  
Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools

Emergency Response and Crisis Management  
FY 2004 Grantees Meeting  
February 1-2, 2005 San Francisco, CA

***An Effective Program for Helping Students  
Cope with Violence:  
Implementing and Evaluating a School-  
based Program***

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## ***Why a Program for Traumatized Students?***

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**One night several years ago, I saw men shooting at each other, people running to hide. I was scared and I thought I was going to die. After this happened, I started to have nightmares. I felt scared all the time. I couldn't concentrate in class like before. I had thoughts that something bad could happen to me. I started to get in a lot of fights at school and with my brothers.**

***Martin, 6th grader***

***“Interpersonal violence is one of the most significant public health issues facing America”***

***C. Everett Koop, 1992***

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- Up to half of children in U.S. exposed to violence
- Emotional and school problems more common in children exposed to violence
  - Post-traumatic stress disorder
  - Depression
  - Behavior problems
  - Poorer grades and test scores, poorer school attendance, lower graduation rates

# *Overview*

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- Collaborative development of the Mental Health Intervention Program
- Description of program and evaluation
- Key findings from program evaluation
- Implications for other school programs

# ***Scant Evidence About Effective Programs for Traumatized Youth***

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- Many programs for youth exposed to violence, but programs have not been rigorously evaluated
- Three programs evaluated but designed for other types of trauma
  - Four-session program for children traumatized by Hurricane Iniki in Hawaii
  - Individual therapy for sexually abused pre-school children
  - Group therapy for sexually abused children and non-offending mothers

## ***Goals of the Collaboration***

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- **Develop program for students exposed to violence, tailored to school setting and staff**
- **Identify children appropriate for program**
- **Rigorously evaluate program outcomes**

# ***Mental Health Intervention Program***

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- 10 group therapy sessions for children, focused on trauma symptoms
- Parent outreach, education about trauma, parenting support
- Teacher education about detecting and supporting traumatized students

## ***Tailoring the Program for Schools***

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- **Provided by school social workers**
  - **2 day training and weekly supervision**
  - **Written manual**
- **Treatment conducive to school setting**
  - **Bell-to-bell**
  - **Flexible**
  - **Modeled on classroom lesson plan**
- **Social workers worked closely with school liaison**



# *Key Program Components*

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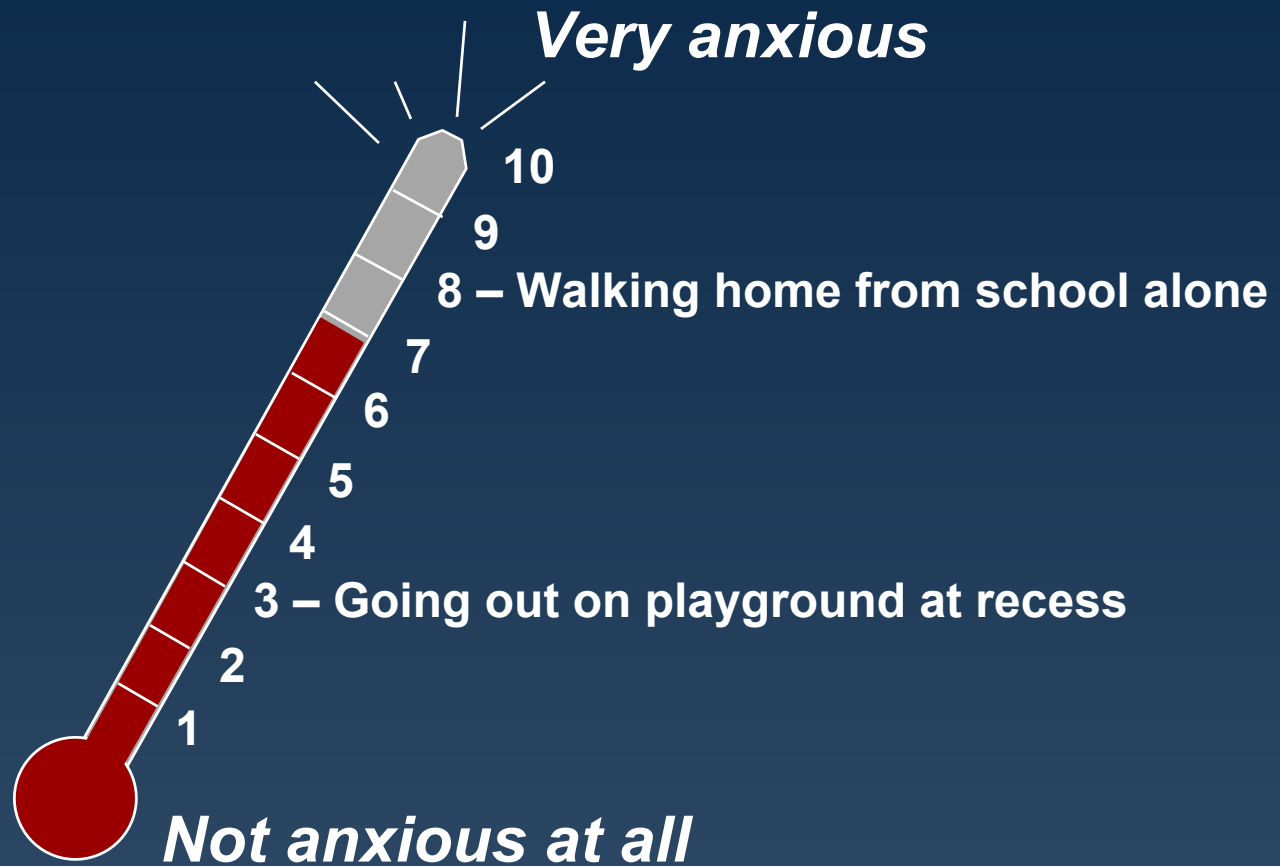
- Educating students about trauma and common symptoms

# *Key Program Components*

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- Educating students about trauma and common symptoms
- Relaxation training and fear thermometer

# *The Fear Thermometer*



# *Key Program Components*

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- Educating students about trauma and common symptoms
- Relaxation training and fear thermometer
- Cognitive therapy

# *Key Program Components*

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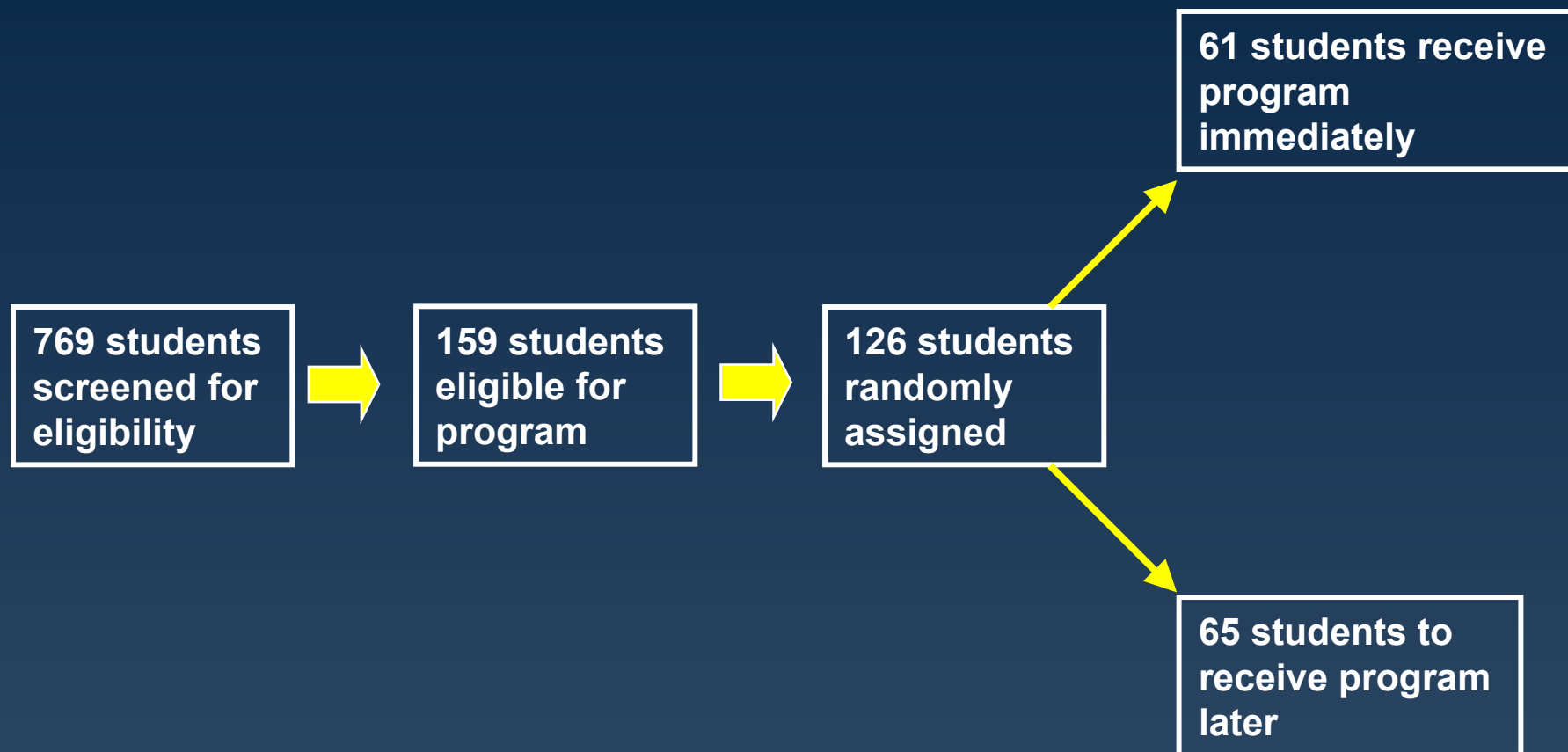
- Educating students about trauma and common symptoms
- Relaxation training and fear thermometer
- Cognitive therapy
- Learning to face the trauma

# *Key Program Components*

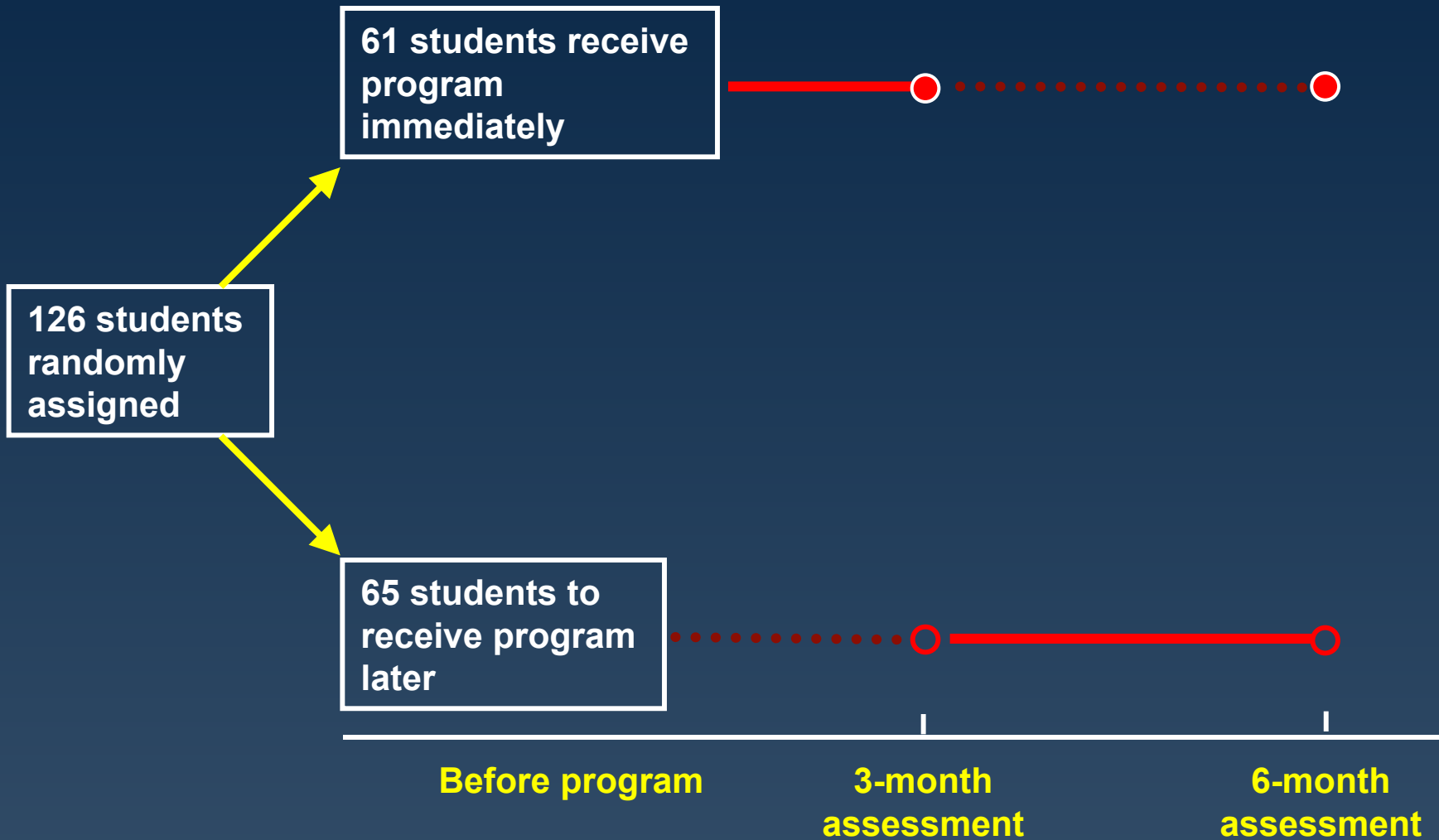
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- Educating students about trauma and common symptoms
- Relaxation training and fear thermometer
- Cognitive therapy
- Learning to face the trauma
- Building skills to get along with others

# *Participation in the Program*



# *Evaluating Program Effectiveness*



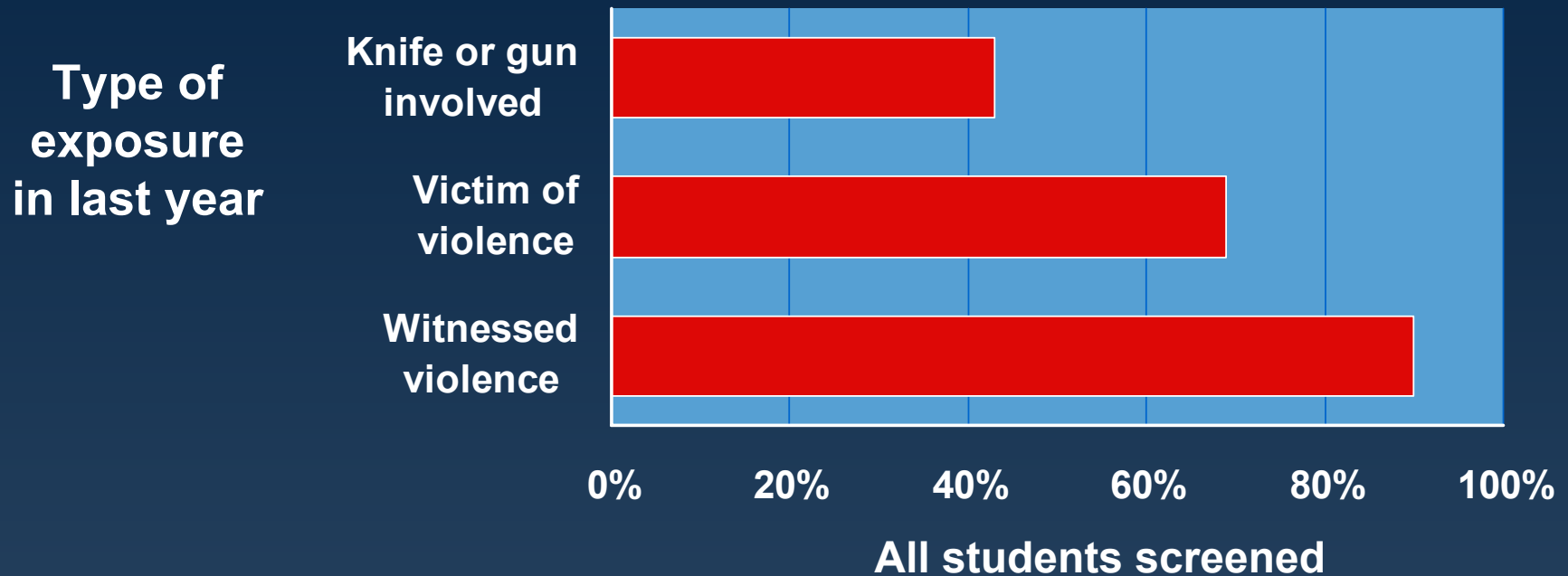


# Screening Children for Violence Exposure and Trauma Symptoms

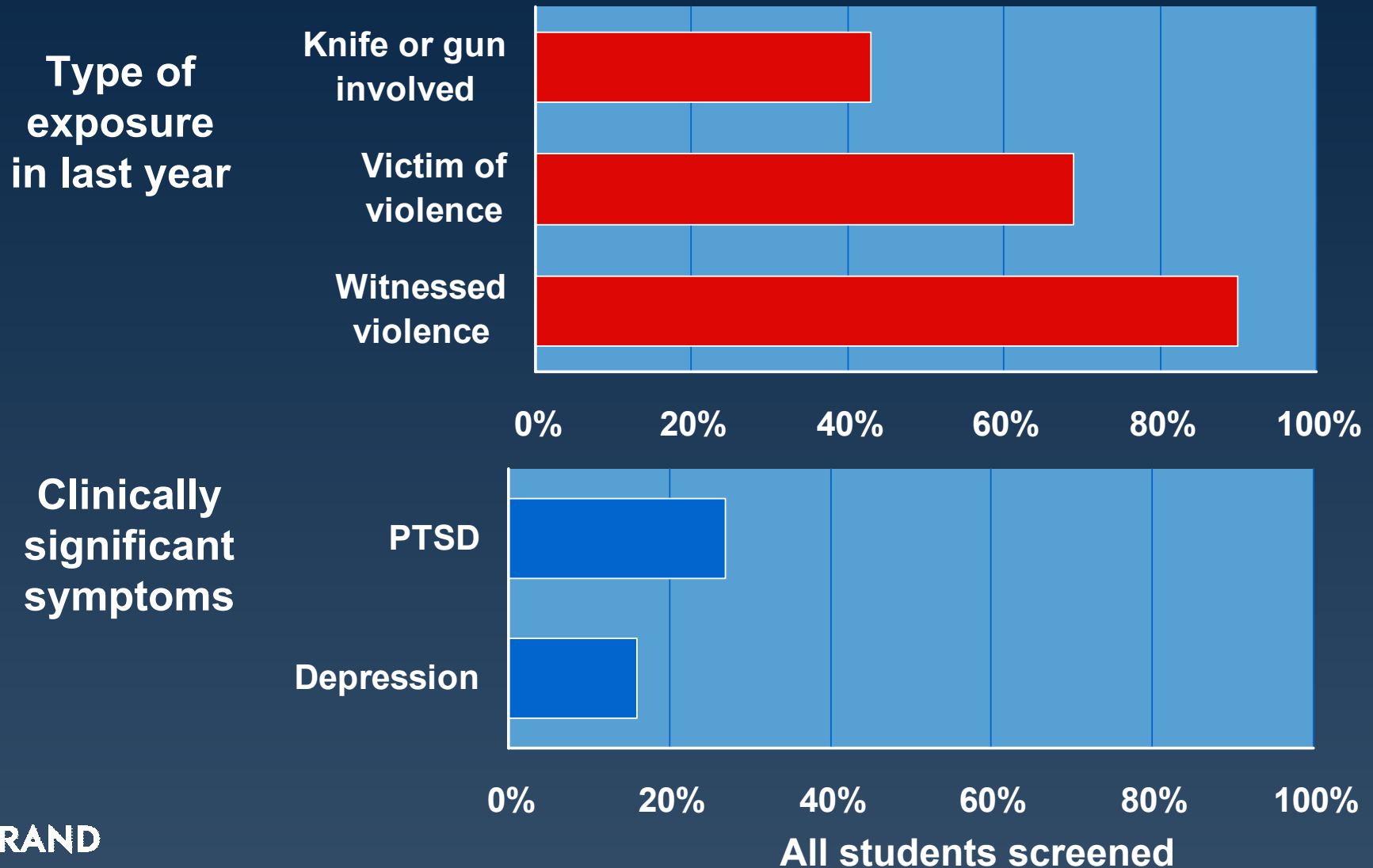
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- Violence exposure
  - How often over the past year have **you** been beaten up *at school*?
  - How often over the past year have you seen someone pointing a *real* gun at **someone else**?
- Trauma symptoms
  - Have you been having nightmares about the event?
  - Have you been avoiding things that remind you of the event?
  - Have you been jumpy or easily startled?

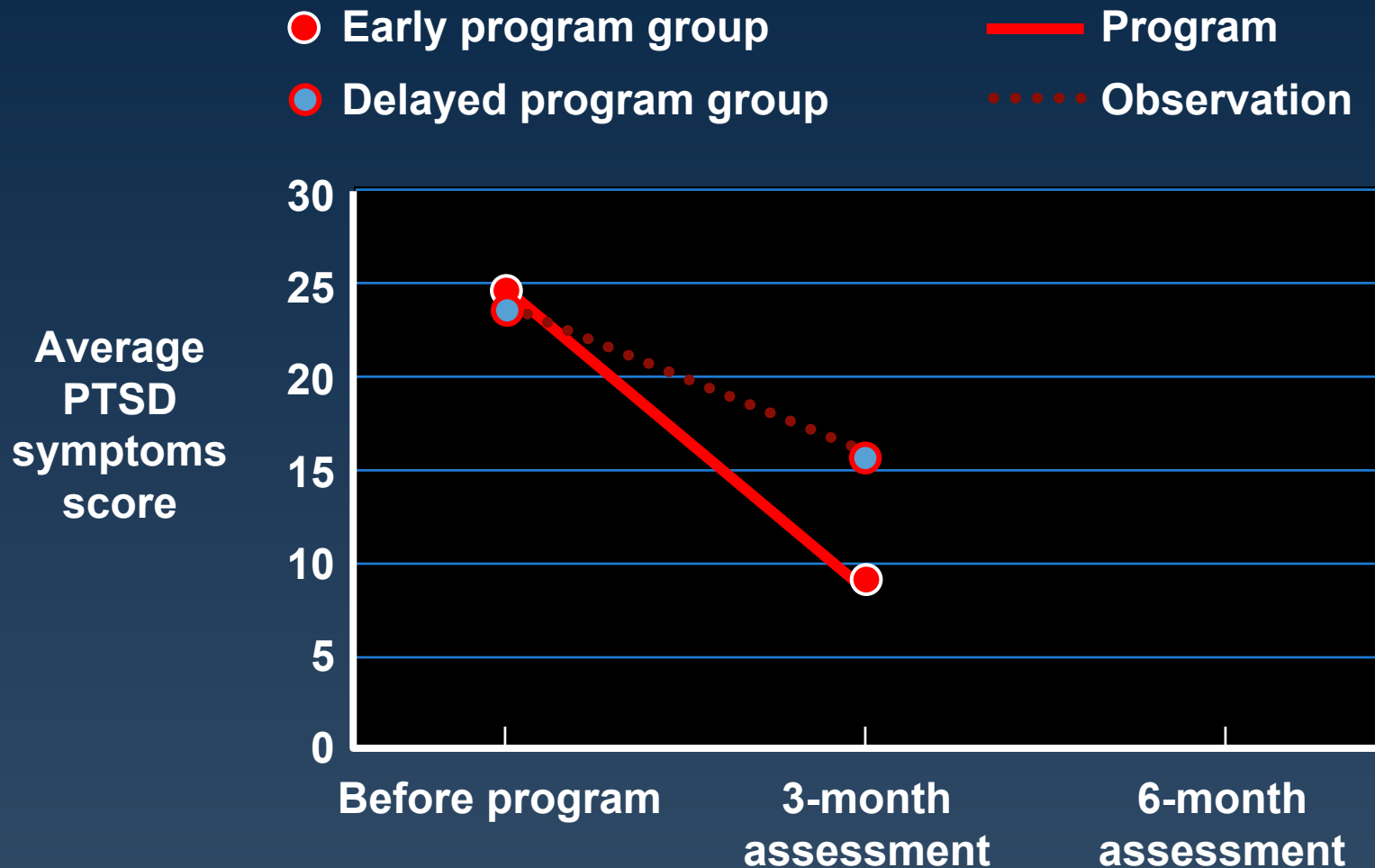
# *Screening Identified many Children with Violence Exposure*



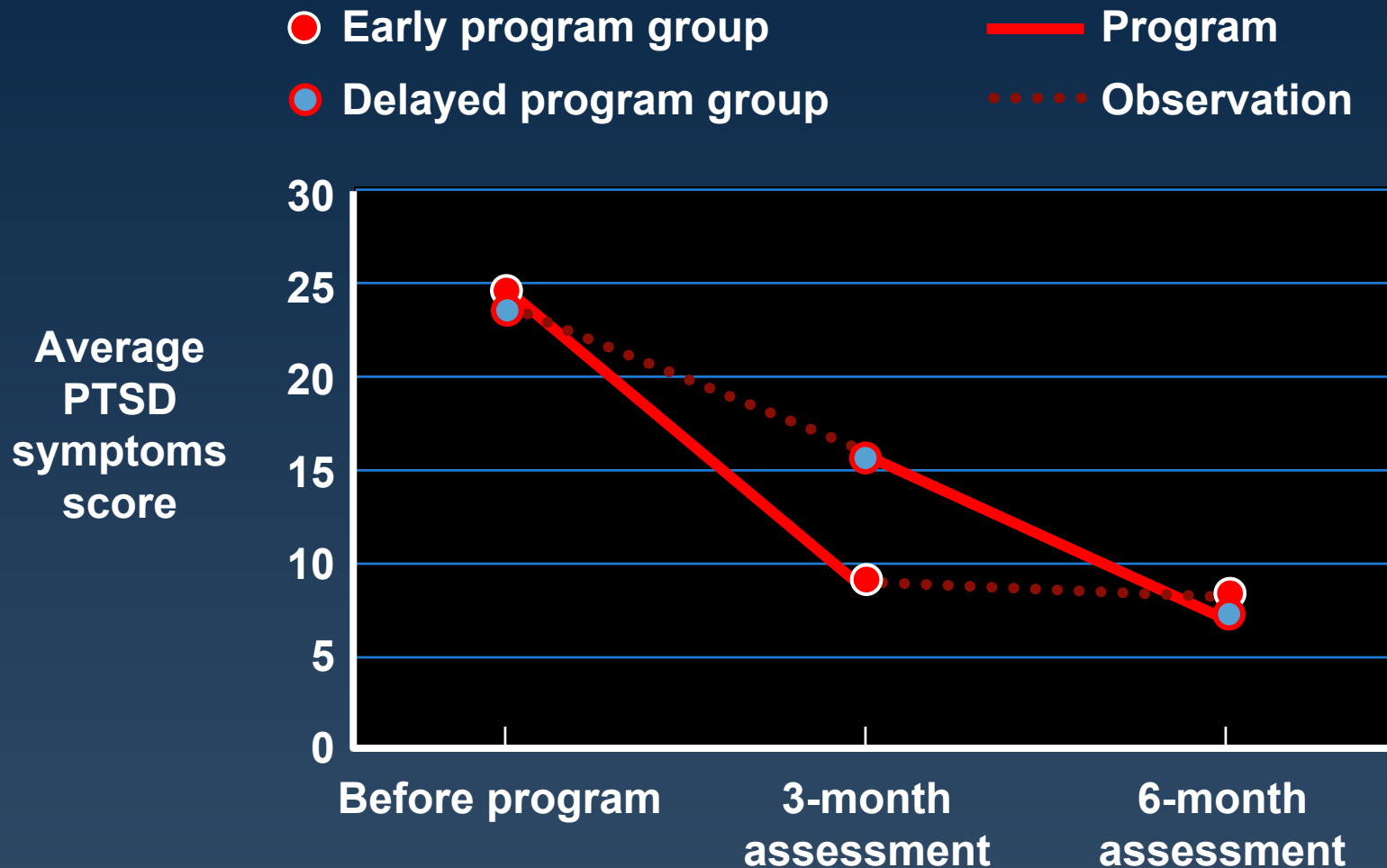
# *Screening also Identified many Children with Clinical Symptoms*



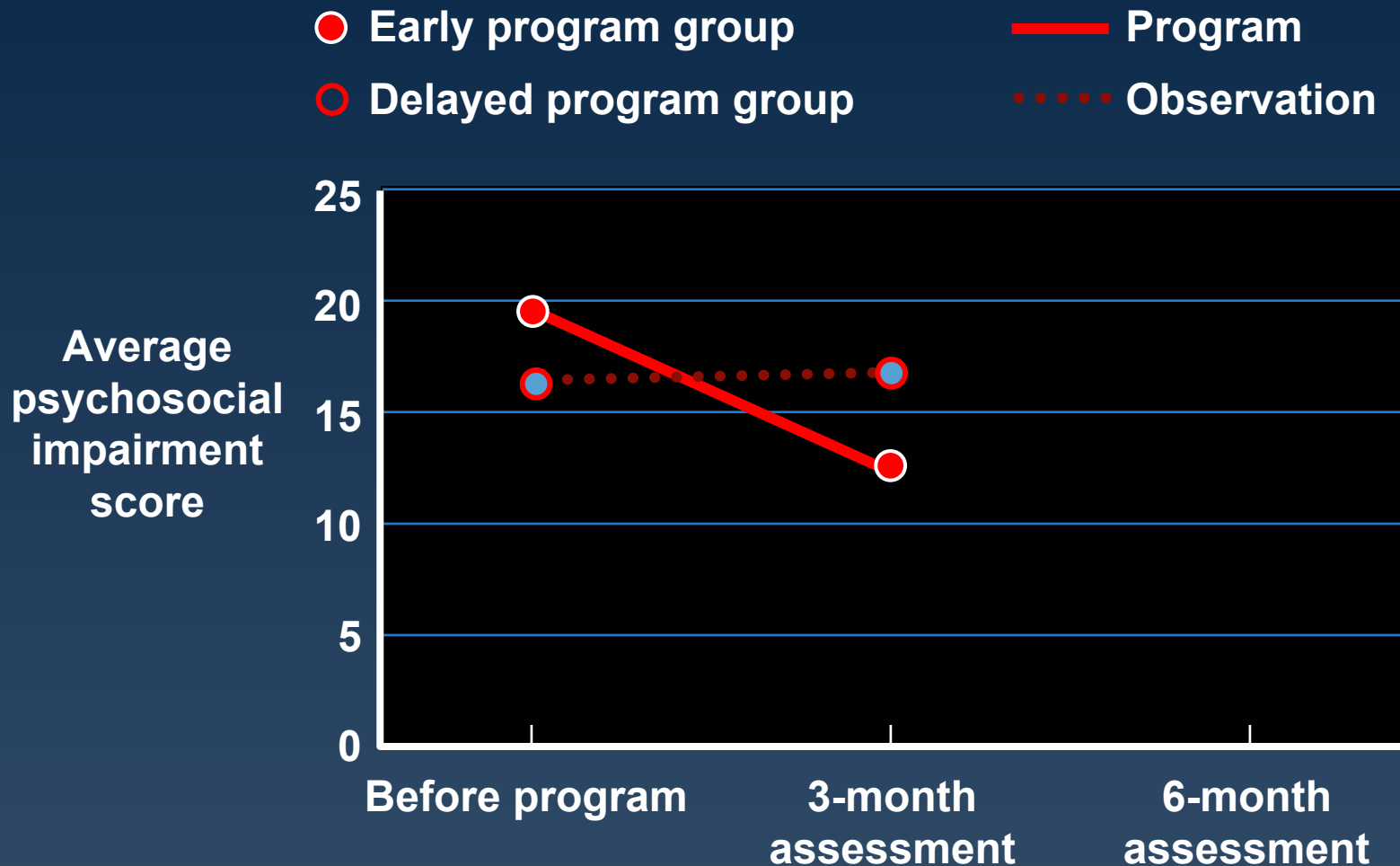
# *Treatment Improves Trauma Symptoms*



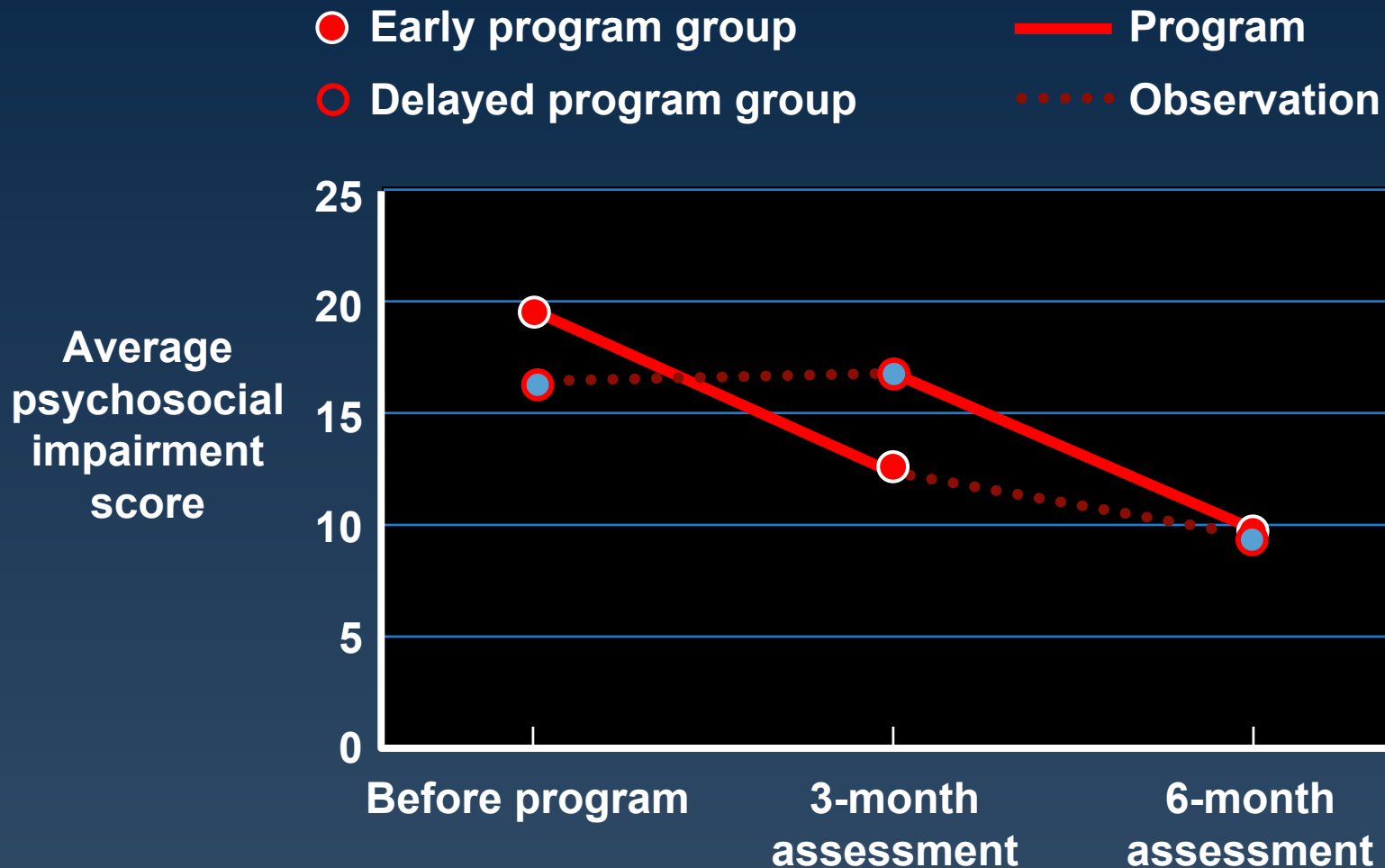
# Improvement in Symptoms Lasts



# Parents Report Children Doing Better



# Improvement in Functioning Lasts



# ***Classroom Behavior and Grades Improved***

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- **As trauma symptoms decreased, grades improved**
- **Teachers reported fewer classroom learning problems after program**



## ***What Did Students Say?***

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**“The group helped me because I don’t have nightmares about that anymore. I don’t think about what happened anymore. Even though I was nervous when I shared this in the group, I felt much better after that. It helps kids concentrate better in class and improve their grades like I did and get along with their teachers”**

***Martin***

## ***What Did Families Say?***

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**“My son is not afraid to come to school anymore... he comes home and talks to me. Before he would just cry and not say anything. Now he’ll come home and tell us what’s bothering him. I realize how important it is to spend time with our kids and listen to them.”**

***Martin’s mother***

## ***What Did Teachers Say?***

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**“I was surprised that so many students qualified for the program.”**

**“Initially, I was concerned because students would be pulled out of class... they weren’t going to do as well. But then you could see them settling down... and doing better.”**

**“I’ve noticed that after the program, students just seem more comfortable in class. And because they are more comfortable, they behave better and do better in class.”**

## ***Where We Are Now***

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- **First program shown to be effective in reducing symptoms of children exposed to violence**
- **Well received by children, parents, and school staff**
- **Can be delivered effectively in schools by individuals already in schools**

## ***The Next Steps***

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- **Do improvements last longer than 3 months after the intervention?**
- **How much of the program can be delivered by other school personnel?**
- **Successfully replicating the program in other schools across the country**
- **Model for designing, implementing, and rigorously evaluating other school programs**